

└ omnibus Popeianis  
f(eliciter)  
et ego qui lego...

good luck to all  
Pompeians: I, too,  
reading this...

[charcoal graffiti from the  
Amphitheatre, CIL IV 1121]







# The other Pompeii

Ordinary  
lives in the  
shadow of  
Vesuvius

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# The other Pompeii Ordinary lives in the shadow of Vesuvius

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curated by Silvia Martina Bertesago, Gabriel Zuchtriegel

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# Contents

- 9 **Introduction**  
Gennaro Sangiuliano
- 13 **Foreword**  
Gabriel Zuchtriegel, Silvia Martina Bertesago
- 17 **The other Pompeii: snapshots from the dark side of history**  
Gabriel Zuchtriegel
- 31 **Telling the story of the invisible ones: an exhibition itinerary as a memory exercise**  
Silvia Martina Bertesago
- 37 **Why history is like drawing lots**  
Gabriel Zuchtriegel, Anna Civale
- 42 **Childhood**  
Teresa Virtuoso
- 50 **The Pompeian diet**  
Chiara Comegna, Chiara Assunta Corbino
- 56 **The servile *familia* at Pompeii**  
Tiziana Rocco
- 63 ***Tunicatus populus*: the clothing and accessories of ordinary people**  
Tiziana Rocco
- 69 **Entertainment and leisure**  
Alessandro Russo
- 81 **Transport and knowledge of the world**  
Alessandro Russo, Ausilia Trapani
- 93 **Spirituality and cult**  
Anna Civale

101	<b>The rituality of death among the poorer classes</b> Teresa Virtuoso	174	<b>3. <i>Servile Familia</i></b> <i>contexts and in-depth analyses</i>
105	<b>The imprint of death: the plaster casts of Pompeii</b> Valeria Amoretti	175	<b>The archaeological complex of Civita Giuliana</b> Federico Giletti
110	<b>Voices from the ‘other Pompeii’: reading the written heritage</b> Maria Chiara Scappaticcio	182	<b>The House of the Lararium Regio V</b> Maria Rispoli, Antonino Russo
115	<b>The creation of the plaster casts: where tradition meets modern technologies</b> Raffaele Martinelli, Roberta Prisco	193	<b>Food for masters, food for slaves</b> Maria Chiara Scappaticcio
118	<b>The restoration of the kitchen cupboard of the House of the Lararium: methodological reflections</b> Ludovica Alesse, Paola Sabbatucci	194	<b>4. Clothing and body care</b>
127	<b>Notes on the layout of the exhibition</b> Vincenzo De Luce	207	<b>5. Entertainment and leisure</b> <i>contexts and in-depth analyses</i>
	<b>The other Pompeii.</b> <b>Ordinary lives in the shadow of Vesuvius</b>	216	<b><i>Ludere</i>. Pompeian pastimes</b> Alessandro Pace
133	<b>1. Childhood</b>	218	<b>Outdoor games</b> Alessandro Russo
149	<b>2. Food and nutrition</b> <i>contexts and in-depth analyses</i>	221	<b>A workshop</b> Alessandro Russo
164	<b>The cupboard of the House of the Lararium</b> Bruno Baglivo	224	<b>A humble abode</b> Gennaro Iovino
170	<b>The glass vessels in the cupboard of the House of the Lararium</b> Anna Civile	227	<b>6. Transport and knowledge of the world</b> <i>contexts and in-depth analyses</i>
		245	<b>The frieze depicting scenes of life in the Forum</b> Anna Civile
		247	<b>7. Spirituality and Death</b> <i>contexts and in-depth analyses</i>
		248	<b>The ritual context in the Sanctuary of Isis</b> Alessandro Russo, Chiara Comegna, Chiara Assunta Corbino
		259	<b><i>Novia Amabiles</i>, mother and wife</b> Llorenç Alapont Martín
		268	<b>Bibliography</b> edited by Alessandro Russo







# Gennaro Sangiuliano

## Minister of Culture

This exhibition suggests that there is more than one Pompeii, excluding the present-day town of Pompei. But no, the ancient Roman city of Pompeii is a single entity, a site of memory of unique worldwide significance due to the famous eruption of Vesuvius. However, the fact that the city was paralysed by lapilli and ash has not turned Pompeii into a place where everything stands still. Quite the opposite. The excavations, which began centuries ago, are still underway and the historical and scientific investigations continue apace. It is a site of memory that will always remain open to investigation. This intense research leads us to the “other Pompeii”, the Pompeii of the poorer classes, of less spectacular finds, a Pompeii that is more “hidden” than the famous city that is so well-known. Indeed, it is the Pompeii of the majority because not just sociology and history, but also common sense and everyday experience teach us that the more affluent social classes, the events documented because they are extraordinary and the most spectacular monuments constitute a tiny minority compared to the overall set of phenomena. History with a capital H is handed down more easily than history with a lower-case h and yet we are indebted especially to twentieth-century French historians such as Bloch, Febvre, Braudel and Ariès for opening up new fertile channels for exploring our past. The traditions, customs and mindset of the middle and lower classes of a society are always, and universally, the most widespread. This explains the location of “the other Pompeii”! Not in the sumptuous frescoed *domus* with spacious atria, but in the much smaller, sometimes cramped spaces where ordinary

people lived and moved; not luxurious furnishings but modest, mundane everyday objects. Not the rich Pompeii that appears to the eyes of visitors but rather the less visible – and partly unseen – Pompeii that lies in the storerooms.

This interest in the more concealed aspects of the ancient city is not just the result of the new historical approaches touched on above but also of our present-day sensibility which tends to focus its gaze elsewhere. Indeed, this approach is not necessarily employed to uphold conflictual “class-based” interpretations but to broaden our knowledge. “The other Pompeii” is not designed to contrast with the famous image of the city but can take its place alongside it. There was no “Pompeian wall” that separated the two entities! “The other Pompeii” is simply a piece – the most conspicuous piece – of this snapshot of the ancient world, the centuries-old image of “the way we once were”, which history has handed down to us and which we have the task of safeguarding, passing down to future generations and enhancing.







